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The Famous
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ISSUED FOR BANJO, MANDOLIN AND GUITAR ENTHUSIASTS

No. 17. DECEMBER, JANUARY 1936-1937.

FINGER TIPS.

A fretted-instrument player should keep his left-hand finger nails reasonably short, because this allows him to stop the strings with the very tips of the fingers. A player should be able to press a note on the second or third string without, in addition, touching unwanted strings at either side. It is a good plan to raise the second joints of the left-hand fingers as high as possible over the strings so that the portion of the finger tips that occupies the smallest area can be used for pressing the strings. In addition to the daily practising of scales with the fingers held in this position, the student should practise arpeggio chords and listen carefully in order that he may be quite sure that every note sounds perfectly clear.

The modern plectrum guitarist who fingers the majority of his chords on a system of first finger barres, likes an instrument with a fairly narrow curved fingerboard. When playing a first finger barre on any fretted instrument, it is the side of the finger that makes contact with the second finger, which should be placed on the fingerboard behind the fret.

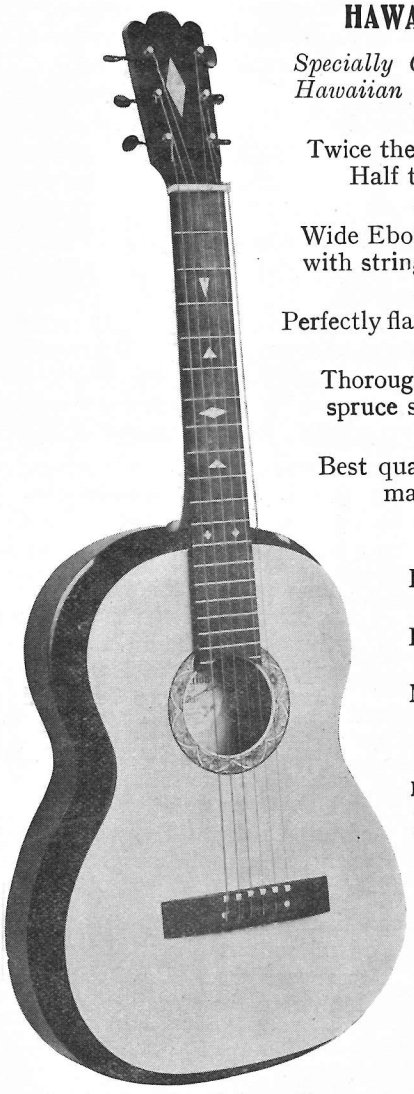
Before playing the chord, the side of the first finger should be moved up to the fret until the latter is felt by the finger. The skin will thus be tightly drawn under the finger and every note will sound perfectly clear.

Many players waste a lot of energy through pressing the chords when no actual playing is being done. The time to press a chord with the left-hand fingers is just before the chord is sounded; and the strings should then be pressed as hard as possible.

Those players who are troubled with sore finger tips during their early studies may be using a badly fretted instrument, or they may be pressing unnecessarily hard at the wrong time as explained in the previous paragraph.

On the other hand, a player's finger tips may be unduly sensitive. As he continues to play, however, they will harden naturally until within a very short time, if he practises regularly, there will be no discomfort whatever.

THE E.G. "REVELATION"
HAWAIIAN GUITAR



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PLAYING PUBLICLY.

By EMILE GRIMSHAW.

It does not seem to be generally realised, that, in order to achieve success as a public performer, the fretted-instrument player, like all other players, must, in addition to being a competent artist, be a competent actor. This acting we usually call showmanship. It is seen in various guises: the manner of walking on and off the stage; an appearance of perfect confidence (which possibly does not exist); a happy smile (probably while thinking of a dozen little worries) and innumerable other things: clothes, make-up, scenery and other accessories that the experienced performer will add to increase the pleasure and value of his performance.

Fretted-instrument players, however, are notoriously lacking in the essentials of showmanship. Extremely likeable in disposition; full of enthusiasm; capable artists; yet very bad actors.

The great majority of players probably have no desire to play publicly. They find their greatest pleasure in playing privately at home, or perhaps for friends or with others at a B. M. and G. club. This necessitates no showmanship.

Playing publicly is, however, quite a different matter; that is, of course, unless a banjoist is engaged to play at an important London concert before an audience of banjoists where everyone is bubbling over with honest enthusiasm, demanding double encores and acknowledging no conventional footlight barriers between artists and audience.

Other audiences, however, are not a bit like this. In addition to an artist being exceptionally clever, he is expected to be entertaining and amusing, and it must be an irritating thought to the conscientious banjoist when he visits a music-hall and realises that the actor or showman part of the turn is of far more importance to the rest of the audience, than is the actual executive skill of the artist. This is no slight on the banjo; nor is the idea new. Players of all musical instruments have benefited considerably by presenting them to the public in an interesting way and playing the right tunes. More than one cathedral organist has done it. Pattman had a special organ built that was transportable and could readily be fitted on the stage of any theatre. He was a great showman: he played the right tunes and was an immediate success.

If a player's ambitions do not soar beyond a public appearance at local concerts, he should make some effort at least to appear cheerful and natural. There should be no tuning on the stage; he should not watch his finger-board all the time; he should not have to explain accompaniment details to the pianist while in sight of the audience; he should know how to acknowledge applause and how to leave the stage naturally.

A clever artist, who is performing in London as I write, creates hilarious fun by introducing into her act many of those little unnatural touches that no audience expects. For example, attired in a beautiful evening gown, she stands in a dignified attitude by the piano and sings a serious romantic ballad. At the end of her song she bows gracefully to the audience and—roller-skates off the stage. That is good fun.

Of course, showmanship does not necessarily mean comedy, but it always consists of a real effort on the part of an artist to present his "turn" in some particular form that will enhance the appeal it makes to his audience.

It is not so interesting, for example, to see four chairs carried on to a stage and carefully adjusted in order to attain some sort of mathematical precision; to see four banjoists saunter on with a banjo in one hand and a bunch of music and a music-stand in the other, followed by an argument between the four players on some matter of a repeated movement; it cannot be so interesting to see a quartet introduced in this manner as it is to see the following: —

The curtain rises. In the centre of the stage is an enormous gramophone horn from which can be heard the smoothly tremoloed strings of banjos playing "Sweet and Low." The harmony is perfect. The volume rises and falls. The entire audience is mystified; delighted; then keenly attentive. At the

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How to Master the Tenor-Banjo	6	0
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close of this opening number, four uniformed banjoists enter the stage from the big horn, and bow smiling acknowledgments to their thoroughly appreciative listeners.

That is how The Record Quartet from South Africa introduced their banjo "Act" to English audiences many years ago.

Other fine showmen banjoists I remember were: The Brothers Bohee; Mays and Hunter; Clark and Earle; Franco Piper; The Howard Brothers, and many others.

The booking manager of a world-famous recording company saw an advertisement of a banjo concert, and thinking that it would be at least a novelty, he decided to attend. Some days later he gave me a most entertaining account of his impressions, but much that he said cannot, for obvious reasons, be repeated here. He wondered why no artist who appeared made any use of the enormous advantage of playing popular tunes.

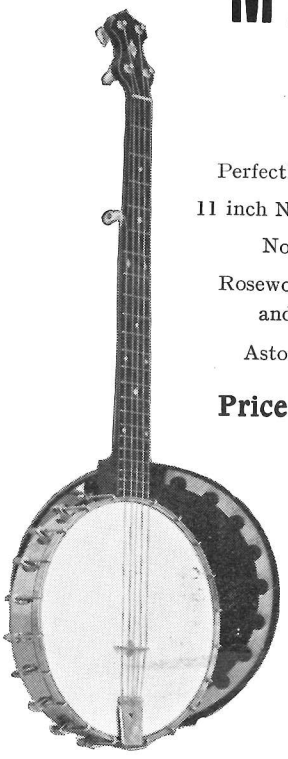
"Instead of this," he continued, "banjoist after banjoist appeared on the stage, one very soulful, some half apologetic, others not very happy, and all played compositions that were unknown to me. The most extraordinary thing about it all was that the audience simply went mad in their enthusiasm for something that seemed to me totally lacking in entertainment value."

When I pointed out to him that the circumstances were exceptional, that probably almost every member of the audience was a banjoist, he was evidently still mystified, because he then said:

"I seem to have lost another illusion. I always imagined that the banjo belonged to the category of happy-go-lucky instruments that are played by those who are young in body and mind: instruments that should not be taken too seriously, that are in their element in song and dance, and that do not seem quite consistent with even the formality of evening dress."

The booking manager was right. He was seeing things as a showman, through the perspective of the box-office window. More recently he will have been reading letters from banjoists who are anxious to buy more banjo records. He will still be thinking of song and dance; of mandolinists in Neapolitan costumes; banjoists and guitarists in cowboy costumes accompanying simple, homely, catchy melodies; tunes that the man in the street likes to hear played over and over again. He will smile as he thinks of Gene Sheldon at the Palladium, who could not begin his solo because his fingers were entangled in the strings—of Eddie Peabody stopping in the middle of a solo because he has suddenly remembered a letter he should have posted on his way to the theatre—of Dave Apollon who, having stated that he had received hundreds of request letters for a particular item to be played that night, turns round to one of his players for confirmation and is told—"one postcard." He will, as I said, probably think of this, and as he drops his own letter or postcard into the waste-paper basket, he

E.G. "MINOR" BANJO



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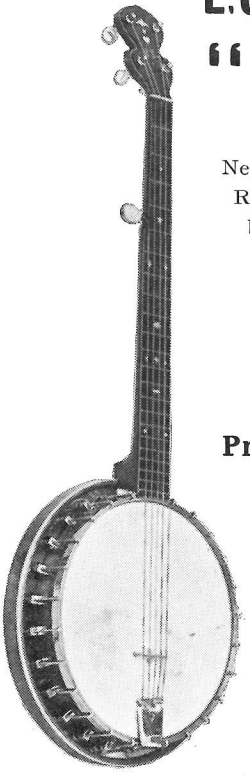
Astounding value.

Price 5 guineas

Flanged resonator 30/- extra.

E.G. "MAJOR"



Neck, hoop and resonator in REAL CHERRYWOOD beautiful rose colour, highly polished.
Metal flange and other metal fittings heavily plated.
Wonderful tone.

Price 10 guineas

Any model Four String Plectrum Banjo, Tenor-Banjo or Banjolin supplied at the same price.

EMILE GRIMSHAW & SON, 54-55 Piccadilly, London, W.1.

will ask himself why these banjoists cannot make some special effort to do something that will make a bigger appeal to the public at large. Those who are in the vast majority: who see, who have to listen, who pay for admittance to the shows and who buy the records.

* * *

QUERIES ANSWERED.

D.K.—Asks why we have given no attention to the electric amplification of fretted instruments.

So far, we have heard no portable electric amplification that justified its existence for players in any other way than as a novelty. We have, in fact, devoted a lot of time to the amplification of musical tone by electrical and other methods, and we are convinced that the best results have been obtained by increasing the volume of tone by natural means rather than by the use of a microphone and loud-speaker.

Anyway, why this passion for electric amplification which is filling the world to-day with all this unnatural booming sound? An electrically amplified Hawaiian guitar has, of course, an enormous volume, but, unfortunately, the tone is more reminiscent of a mixture of musical saw, electric power station and human pain, than the tone of an Hawaiian guitar.

A good case can be made for the use of microphone and loud-speakers in the open air, but in a concert hall or theatre the natural tone of either a voice or a musical instrument is surely preferable.

* * *

D.J.—A banjo can be strung with silk ("Mellotone"), gut ("Rubygut"), or with wire ("Silvatone"). Frequently the above strings are mixed as, for instance: first, "Silvatone"; second and fifth, "Mellotone"; third, "Rubygut" and fourth, "Copper Burnished." For either plectrum or nail playing, we recommend first and second, "Silvatone"; third, "Silkamin"; fourth, "Copper Burnished," and fifth, "Silvatone" wire or "Mellotone" silk.

* * *

A.M.—The best plectrum for mandolinists is undoubtedly the "Dilly." This pick is also used exclusively by hundreds of banjoists who like a plectrum of medium flexibility with a smooth bevelled playing edge. You can remember the name quite easily by thinking of the word "Piccadilly." When you are next ordering plectra, pick a "Dilly." The price is sixpence each. Another plectrum of similar shape but made from real tortoiseshell is called the "Conn"—an abbreviation of the word "connoisseur." This pick also has a smooth bevelled playing edge and costs one shilling.

* * *

D.F.—Players of fretted instruments should not have to be told that the gears of the tuning machines must occasionally be either oiled or lightly smeared with a touch of vaseline. If this were done periodically, there would be fewer stripped gears and fewer broken machine buttons.

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"SILKAMIN"

Banjo 3rd String?

THE "SILKAMIN" Banjo 3rd String. A perfectly true string made from pure silk wrapped with fine aluminium wire. Excellent for tone and durability. Ideal for plectrum playing. **Price 9d.**

R.A.M.—The small old guitars with thin soundboards and glued down bridges will not, as a rule, withstand the enormous strain of the steel strings that are used for plectrum playing. Should the bridge be pulled away from the soundboard, it is possible that a portion of the latter may also break away, causing the instrument to be ruined beyond repair.

* * *

W.A.—Asks if it is possible to vibrate the strings of the Hawaiian guitar with a plectrum and play solos successfully. We know several excellent players who use only this method. Of course, published solos have more or less to be adapted to suit the plectrum method, because when chords are played the notes must then occur on adjacent strings.

* * *

H.M.—When buying a guitar for the Hawaiian style of playing, choose one that has a wide fingerboard; a bridge securely attached to the soundboard of the instrument; a perfectly flat nut and bridge, and strong geared tuning machines. The strings should be fixed to the bridge instead of to a metal extended tailpiece, and the tone should be resonant and powerful. These essentials and many more are to be found in the New E.G. "Hartford," "Hartford 12" and "REVELATION" Hawaiian guitars.

* * *

W.R.—The solos you will play best will probably be those you yourself *like* best. It does not, however, follow that these will be the ones your audiences will prefer. If you intend to play publicly you should try and ascertain what your listeners will be likely to appreciate. Many solos that will appeal to an audience of fretted-instrument players will probably fail to make the least impression on an audience of non-players.

* * *

G.H.C.—If, as you say, you wish to study harmony, it is a good plan first of all to know how music is written for the piano, which, to a fretted-instrument player, is principally a matter of learning the notes on the "bass" or lower stave. The reason for this, is that all the harmony books assume that the student is a pianist, and examples of chords and their progressions are consequently given in pianoforte notation.

* * *

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"Well-known dance band has vacancy for guitarist; rhythmical, competent, or useless." (*Advt.*)

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"Variety artist seeks engagements. Can sing, dance and play banjo by ear." (*Advt.*)

Evidently neither finger nor plectrum exponent.

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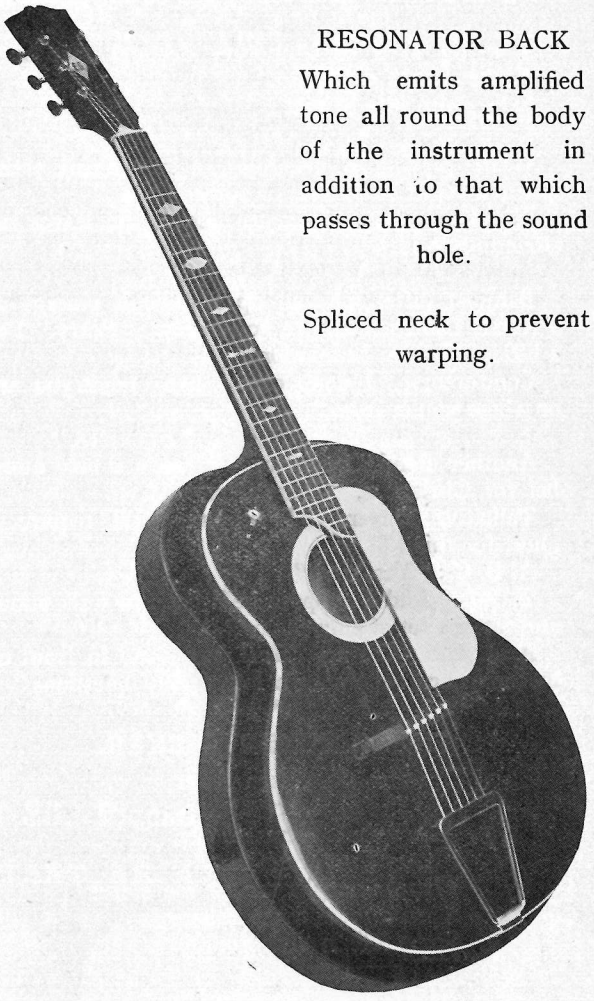

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Body of guitar, neck and resonator in beautiful dark rosewood finish, bound with Ivorine.

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"You don't seem to know what good hot guitar playing is."

"No. What good is it ?"

* * *

An East End banjoist is said to be able to play more than a hundred solos from memory.

A Wapping repertoire, of course.

* * *

A well-known dance guitarist has been greatly worried because illness prevented his fulfilling many engagements.

Cancelitus is the medical name for it.

* * *

"I played 'Community Medley' and brought the house down," writes an enthusiast.

For he's a jolly good feller, and so say all of us.

* * *

A writer in a contemporary declares that only fools are sure of anything.

Is he quite sure of that ?

* * *

While playing a mandolin, a music-hall artist makes a rapid succession of somersaults.

In other words, to ensure success he leaves no stone unturned.

* * *

Banjoist (after messing up a difficult passage at a recent band contest) to conductor: "Sorry. I'm a little stiff from badminton."

Conductor: "I don't care a hang what you are or where you're from."

* * *

Another Band Conductor: "Here's a new number for Christmas, 'Ghost Dance.'"

Talkative Player: "I suppose we'll require a ghost for this ?"

A. B. C.: "Yes, sir !"

T. P.: "And I suppose he'll have to walk about and rattle a lot of silly chains ?"

A. B. C.: "Oh no. He'll just stand in front of the orchestra answering a lot of silly questions."

* * *

THE QUICKER PICKER.

I'm a much quicker picker
Than John Henry Ricker.
Although he seems slicker,
I know I'm far quicker.
There's naught makes me sicker
Than a metronome ticker.
Some folk in their liquor
Will argue and bicker
And say there's no picker
So rapid as Ricker.
I say without flicker
Of a lid I'm a clicker
When compared with a sticker
In the mud like old Ricker.
Good tone may be slicker,
Thin volume be made thicker,
But I'm a high kicker
Knowing I'm a slick picker
Much quicker than Ricker.

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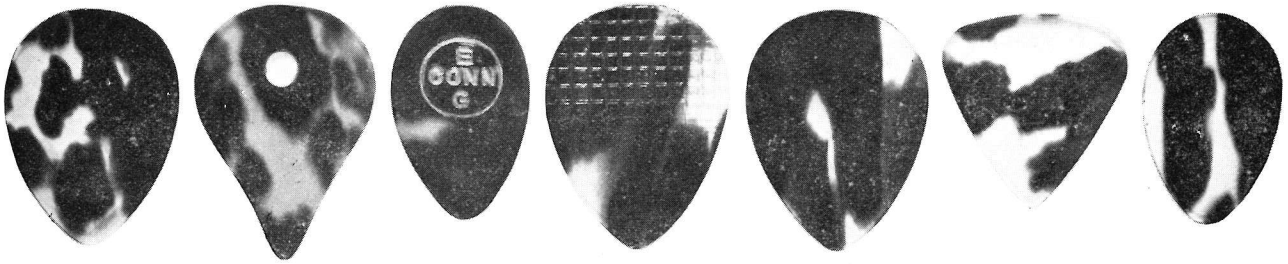

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Mr G. A. KEELER writes:

We played "Chop Suey" at the Dagenham Club Concert and it went down very well indeed We had silk Chinese banners in front of the stands; the Chinese flag on a separate staff and several Chinese lanterns.

———

Mr. GOODEY-WILLIAMS writes:

"Chop Suey" welly muchee nicee. Chop, Chop!

———

Mrs ELSIE DAWSON writes:

"Chop Suey" is a real novelty and makes quite a change. I should think it will be very successful.

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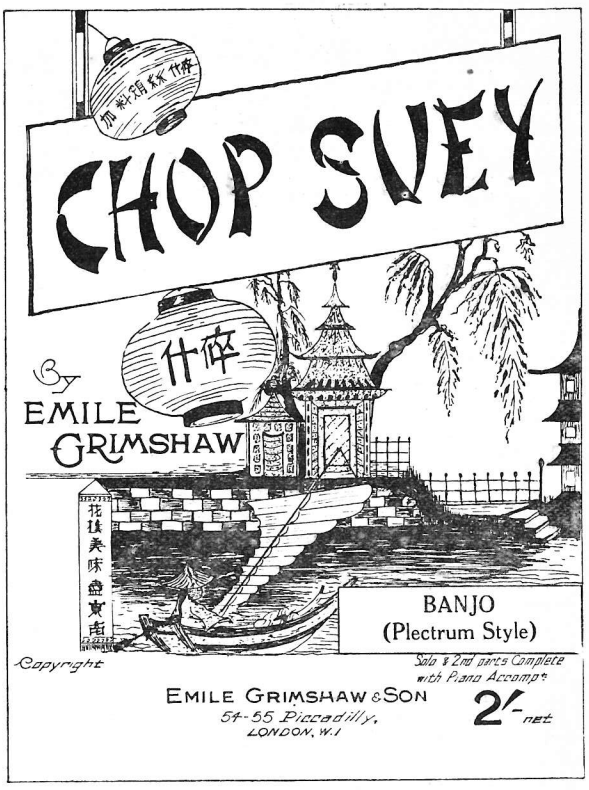

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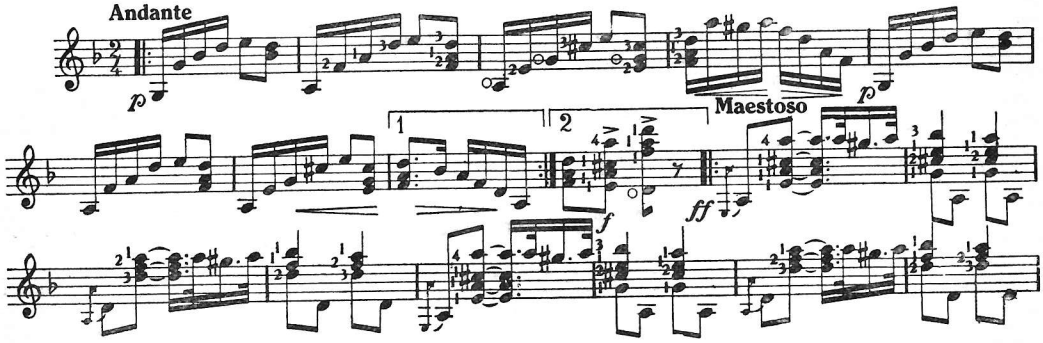
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